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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

MONDAY, January 25, 1943

SUBJECT: "LEATHER CARE." Information from chemists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and officials of the Office of Price Administration.

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Leather continues to be such a valuable wartime material that the Government must take a hand in conserving it for essential uses. The boys in uniform need shoes and more shoes as well as belts, gloves, straps and other leather articles. Civilians must have shoes, too-- and leather for repair of shoes...also leather health articles like braces and surgical supports. But up until recently leather that could go into these essential articles has been going for nonessentials like women's handbags and pocketbooks, fancy belts and other decorative articles.

So last month the Government issued orders to put its leather supplies to the proper uses. One order restricted goatskin and kidskin leather to military uses, civilian shoes and health articles and prohibited their use in nonessential articles like women's handbags. Another order set aside 20 percent of the sole leather manufactured this month for repair of civilian shoes. And still another order continues to restrict for our armed forces and allies the cattle hides, goat, kid, calf and kip skins used in making garment leather.

These recent orders give you an idea of how valuable leather is right now. If it is valuable enough for your Government to conserve, you may well take the tip and do some conserving of the leather you own--shoes especially, of course, but also leather gloves, belts, handbags, luggage, jackets and coats, leather-covered furniture, harnesses, saddles--anything of leather.

Chemists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say that the way to make leather last and give good service is to keep it soft and pliant. And they say the way to keep it soft and pliant is to oil or polish it. The kind of oil, or grease,

or wax you use depends on the kind of leather. Leather loses its strength and wearing qualities if it dries out. And it dries out extra fast if it gets wet. That takes out some of the natural oil, and leaves it dry, stiff and hard. Mud is especially hard on leather. Mud not only makes it hard and dry but stains it as well.

So at this time of year especially, you need to protect your shoes against mud and rain. If your shoes do get muddy, remember not to let the mud dry on. Wipe it off as soon as you can.

Here's how the chemists suggest caring for wet shoes. First, wash off all mud and grit with warm but not hot water. Then rub oil or grease into the leather. Rub it in while the leather is still wet. Then the leather will not dry stiff and hard. Next, stuff the shoes with soft crumpled paper to hold them in their proper shape and to absorb moisture from the inside. Finally, set the shoes on a folded newspaper to dry. Let them dry where it is not too warm. Too much heat can ruin leather. So never let shoes dry near a hot fire, a stove or a radiator. Heat not only dries out leather, it often scorches it as well. Leather scorches much more easily when wet than when dry. Here's one more point about wet shoes: Don't put them on until they are thoroughly dry. That's not so much for the sake of your health as for the sake of the shoes. Wet leather is soft and weak. It pulls out of shape easily. Also it tears, cuts and wears out easily.

Lubricating keeps leather soft, strong and pliant--keeps it from drying out. The kind of oil or grease to use on shoes or other leather articles depends on the article and the kind of leather. Street shoes or "best" shoes don't need much greasing--probably don't need any unless you get them wet. Keep your "good" shoes in condition by polishing with shoe polish. If they get wet, you can rub them with a little castor oil. That's the only kind of oil you can put shoe polish over.

But heavy shoes for farming and gardening need plenty of greasing to make them last. They have to stand up under moisture and mud day after day. You can use several different oils for heavy outdoor shoes. Neat's foot oil is good. So is castor oil, tallow, wool grease, or mixtures of these. Have the grease just slightly warm, and put it on the shoes with a soft cloth. Then rub it in thoroughly with the palm of your hand--"massage it in," you might say. Thorough oiling protects leather against mud, water, drying, heat and dirt....also against perspiration which can do a lot of damage to leather. Perspiration has ruined many a good pair of shoes, and gloves as well as belts and jackets. But oiling and polishing helps keep the perspiration from sinking into the leather.

Leather suffers from both acids and alkalies. The lime used on lawns, fields, and gardens, for example, or Portland cement, or lye used in soap-making, all may damage leather. If your shoes or leather gloves come in contact with these substances, clean the leather at once, and then grease it well.

By the way, you can clean leather by washing with soap and water if you follow the washing by greasing or polishing. Use mild pure soap or saddle soap and as little water as possible. Wipe the soap off with a damp cloth. Don't rinse with water. Dry thoroughly, and then rub in the oil--or polish the leather.

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